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IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS

25 Fenrar, the Desert Stalker

Danger and Deceit at Dead River Sands

Julek Heller

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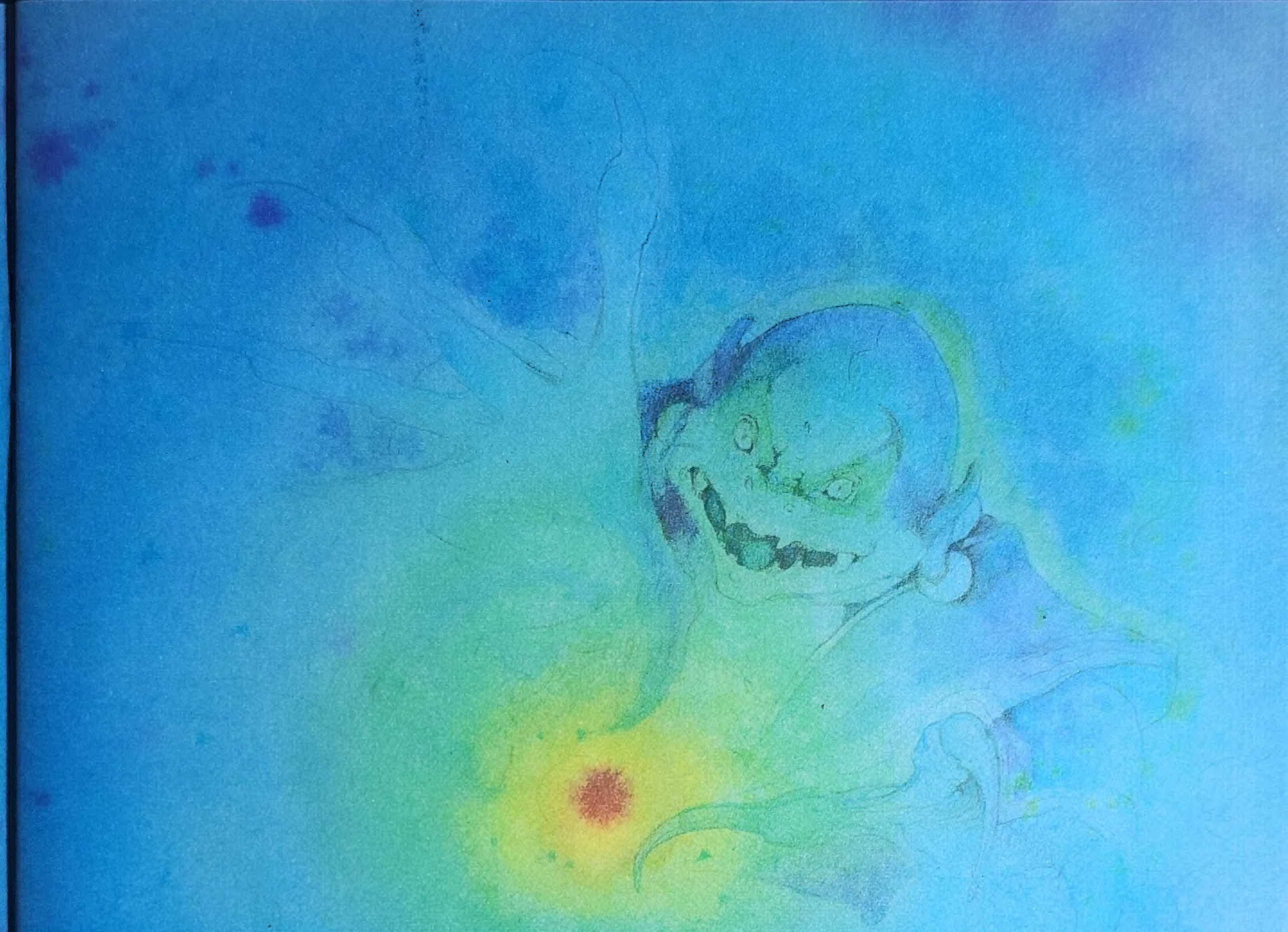
From a story by Frank Graves

On the Twenty-Fifth Day . . .

Walking underneath the sun,
Do not fear the vision double.
Do not waver! Do not run!
Falsehood now is not a trouble.
Shifting shapes amid the sand
Travail the three by Wizard's Well.
A toothy welcome is at hand
To chink ajar the gates of hell.



Even as Syrus lifted his finger to deliver the death spell, Richard sensed Golan's voice going through his mind, "The words that free will also kill."

Richard concentrated hard. Their names spoken backwards three times had freed them from the bubbles. Perhaps the same spell would work against Syrus.

"Surys! Surys! Surys!" Richard yelled.

Shrinking genie

Syrus looked at Richard with a face as black as thunder. His finger quivered with the power of suppressed magic. Richard sighed inwardly. He had gambled and lost. Then he noticed that something odd was happening to the genie. Syrus's limbs and features were shrinking inwards, as if someone had pulled a plug in the middle of his body. He shrank smaller and smaller, his frame imploding towards a glowing red disc that had appeared in the middle of his torso.

The genie dwindled further and further until he disappeared entirely. Then the red disc began to shrink until it was little more than a pin-sized ember. For an instant it hung in mid-air, then vanished, leaving only a wisp of orange smoke that drifted away across the room.

Richard, Orkan and Melek dashed through the door in pursuit of the Landsmen, who had been waiting a short way down the tunnel. When they heard what had happened to Syrus, there was a loud cheer. Then, with Richard and Ronek leading the way, the group moved on.

At the end of the tunnel, they burst out into fresh air on top of the mountain. Before them, in a wide natural bowl, lay the lake that fed Sorcerer's Falls.

"There's one more pod at Wizard's Well," Richard told Ronek. "Do you know anything about the place?"

"Only that it's in the desert and guarded by a host of different beasts," Ronek replied. "We'll come with you."

"No," Richard said without hesitation. "You head back to the Ancestral City and join Golan."

Reluctantly, Ronek and his Landsmen bade the trio farewell.

"What does the *Book of Prophecies* say, Melek?" Richard asked, as he watched the Landsmen disappear in the distance.

Melek flattened the tome and read the prophecy aloud.

"Well," Richard pondered, "apart from a toothy welcome, it doesn't throw any light on the beasts that Ronek mentioned. It seems more concerned with deception – falsehood and shifting shapes."

"It could be the desert itself," Orkan suggested. "The dunes move every year, creating new landmarks and covering the old. In the desert you can rely only on yourself. Nothing else is certain."

"Maybe you're right," Richard said sombrely.

The three made their way down to the bottom of the mountain where Richard

took out the Path Finder. They followed its golden arrow through the last canyons of Yellow Stone Peaks until they arrived at the desert.

Shimmering sands

The desert stretched far into the horizon, a rolling carpet of sand that broiled beneath a blazing sun. Every dune looked alike, as did the valleys that separated them. All that moved was the constant, upwards shimmer of hot air. All that could be heard was the sound of the companions' own breathing.

Gripping the Path Finder, Richard stepped into the gritty landscape.

Once in the desert, the trio's progress slowed to a snail's pace. The dunes were treacherous, their hard, sun-baked surfaces hiding slippery depths of sand. More than once they climbed a slope only to have the ground give way beneath them, sending them slithering back the way they came. As they struggled, the sun blazed down on their shoulders and backs.

Richard could feel the leather straps of his new armour biting into his flesh. Yet he found it surprisingly light to wear and it did not seem to trap the heat at all. He was glad to have it – danger could be lurking behind any dune.

Approaching enemy?

Richard's fears were confirmed when the rolling sand hills suddenly ended, revealing a parched expanse of flat ground. In the middle distance he could make out three figures moving towards them. They looked exhausted but had, nevertheless, an erect, purposeful air.

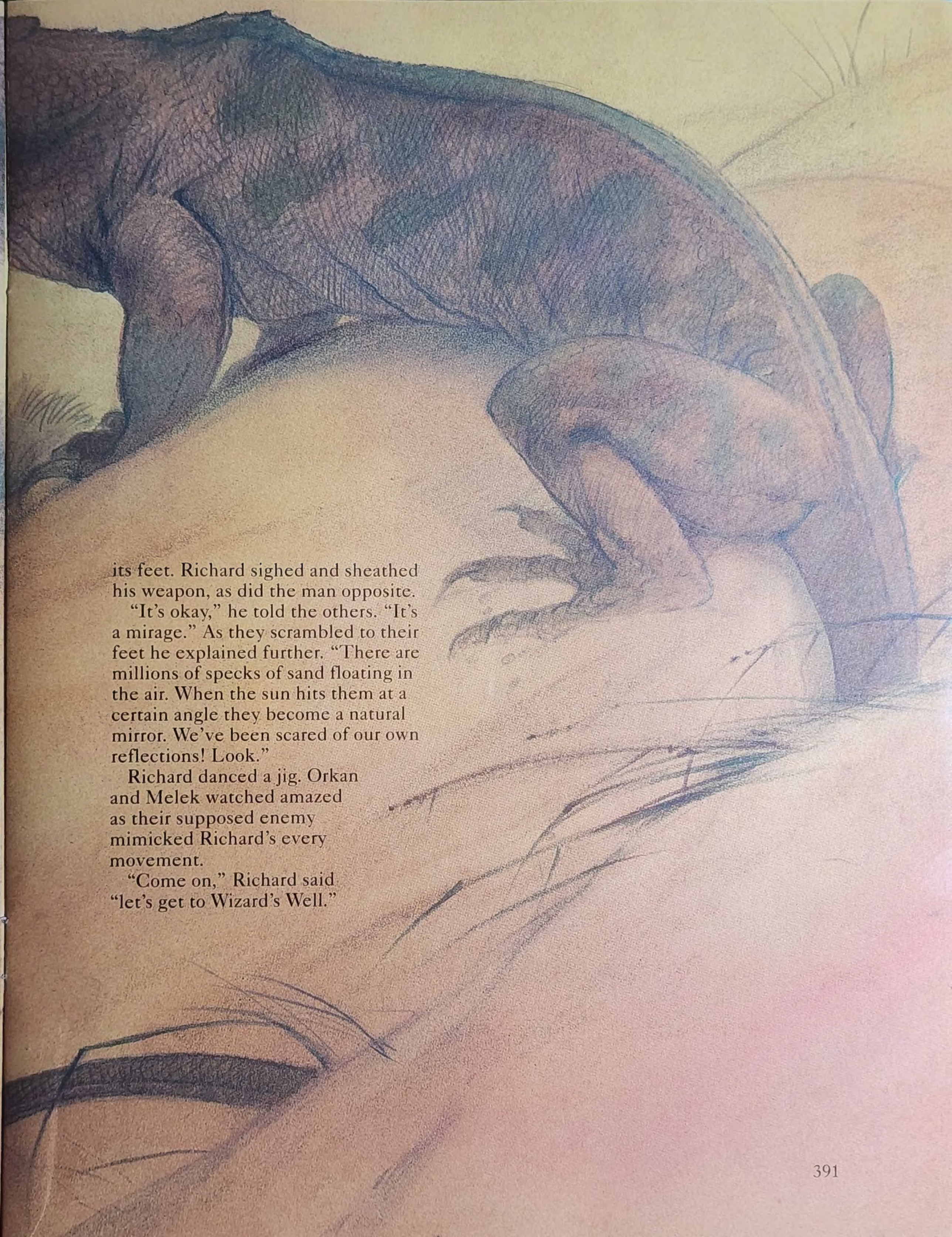
"Look!" Richard grabbed Orkan by the arm "Who do you think they are?"

"I don't know," the warrior scowled. "It's hard to tell in this heat. The haze tends to distort everything. Best take no chances. We'll walk in single file. That way we show a smaller image and just might go unnoticed."

They bunched up in a line. Richard was dismayed to see their enemies do the same. He stared angrily at the indistinct blob that shimmered across the sands.

"Get down!" he hissed to Orkan and Melek.

They did so, and immediately their foe did likewise. Richard turned on one side to draw his dagger and saw a mirror movement come from across the plain. A thought suddenly struck him. He raised an arm. So did one of the newcomers. He thrust his dagger in the air. His opponent did the same. Then Richard stood up. Over the sands an indistinct figure rose to



its feet. Richard sighed and sheathed his weapon, as did the man opposite.

"It's okay," he told the others. "It's a mirage." As they scrambled to their feet he explained further. "There are millions of specks of sand floating in the air. When the sun hits them at a certain angle they become a natural mirror. We've been scared of our own reflections! Look."

Richard danced a jig. Orkan and Melek watched amazed as their supposed enemy mimicked Richard's every movement.

"Come on," Richard said "let's get to Wizard's Well."

The companions trudged on, and as they advanced the figures disappeared. A few moments later another set of shapes loomed before them.

"Another mirage!" Orkan exclaimed.

"They're real trees," Richard shouted excitedly as they got closer to the shapes. "It must be Wizard's Well!"

Welcoming oasis

The trio rushed forward. Sure enough, the trees were real, waving palms that stood around a crystal blue lake. The oasis shone like a jewel of fertility against its backdrop of barren desert.

They headed for the water, but were confronted by a huge lizard that scuttled from behind a clump of rocks. Richard felt sure it was one of those they had freed from Dragora's lair.

"Welcome to Wizard's Well," the lizard said. "I'm Fenrar."

The reptile's greeting was friendly, its expression open. Any lingering doubts Richard might have had were dispelled.

"We're looking for the Life Force Pod," Richard said. "Do you know were it's hidden?"

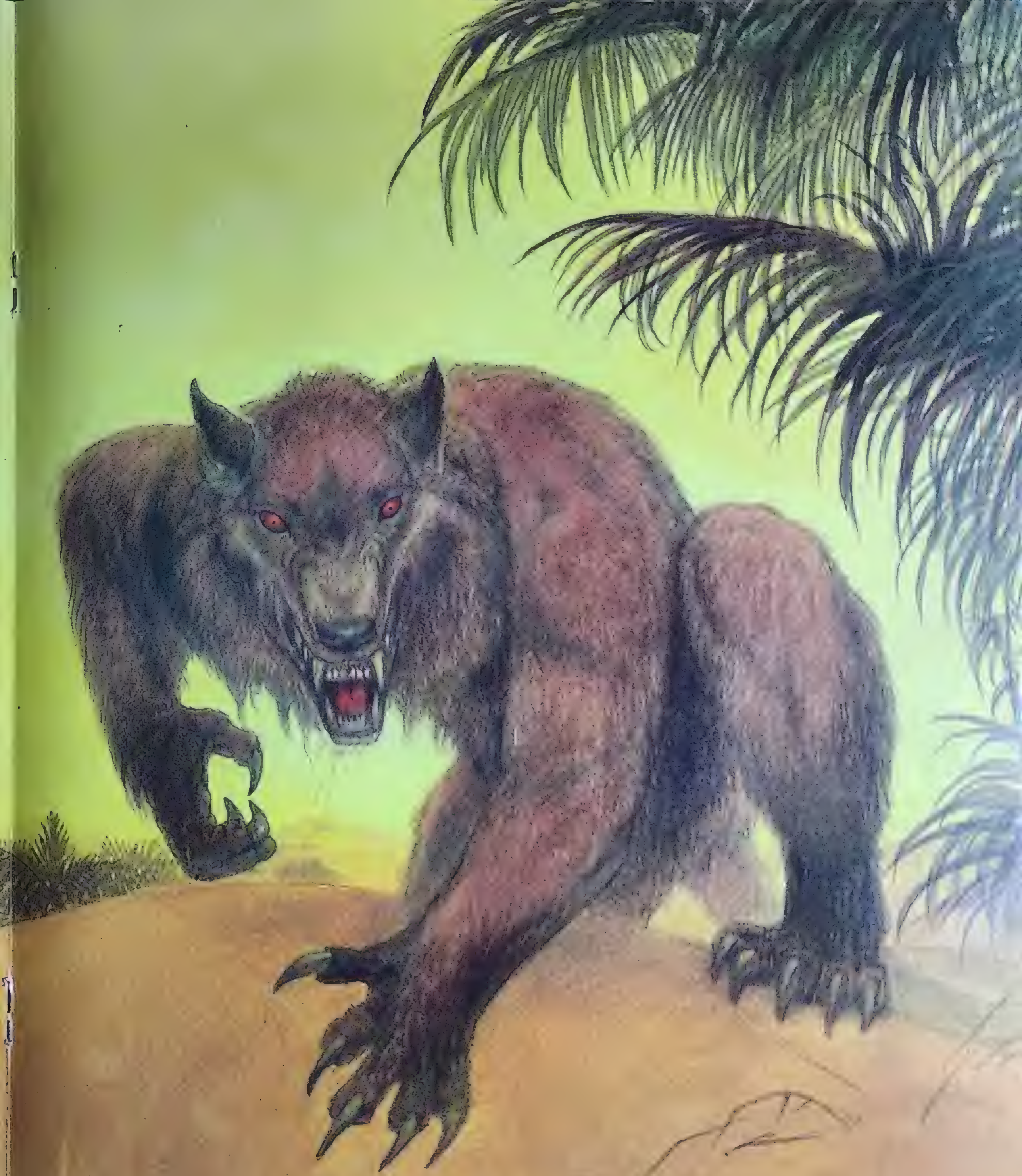
"Pod? No, but I'll help you to look for it. Why don't you have a refreshing swim before we start? You look as if you've had a long, dusty journey."

The trio needed no encouragement. They hurried to the water's edge and unbuckled their weapons. Richard eased himself out of his armour and piled it under a tree. Melek placed the *Book of Prophecies* alongside. The three removed the rest of their clothes and rushed into the sparkling waters.

While the trio splashed about, Fenrar watched them through slitted eyes. When they were fully occupied, he slunk forward and removed their belongings, one by one, hiding them behind a dune. Then he crept back to his place under the trees.

Changing shape

Richard was the only witness to what happened next. Some sixth sense made him glance back at the trees and what he saw rooted him to the spot. Fenrar was changing shape. His legs were getting longer, his tail shrinking. Ears pricked on his head and his jawline sharpened into a



canine muzzle. Dark, wiry hair sprouted all over his body. The transformation was complete within seconds. In place of the lizard there was now a wolf. Fenrar raised his head and gave a ferocious howl.

Richard understood everything in a flash. The shifting shapes in the prophecy now made sense. As did Ronek's stories of the oasis being guarded by many different beasts. The three were in the clutches of a monster that could change its appearance at will.

"Let's get our weapons!" Richard shouted.

Fenrar laughed as the three floundered out of the water and stumbled across the sand to the spot where they had left their equipment.

"He's taken everything," Orkan said in frustration.

At Fenrar's mercy

With a wolfish grin the beast loped lightly towards the trio. His eyes were gleaming red slits and long loops of saliva drooled down from his open jaws. He surveyed the three sodden figures with relish.

"I'll take you first," he said, pouncing at Melek.

The wolf moved fast. Orkan and Richard had no chance to stop him. One moment the scribe was standing beside them, the next he was gripped in Fenrar's jaws. The wolf backed off, all the while keeping his eyes fixed on Richard and Orkan in case they tried to flee.

"Run! Save yourselves!" Melek shouted, squirming between Fenrar's teeth.

Richard was at a loss. Without weapons there was nothing they could do to save their friend. He looked around in despair, searching for something he could use against Fenrar. What he saw took his breath away.

Flying towards the oasis was a white winged horse. It came in low over the water, creating whirlpools of turbulence with each beat of its wide, snowy wings. Its mane flowed back in the wind, and its galloping hooves kicked up little plumes of spray as they caught the surface. Richard knew that their salvation was at hand.

Saviour from the sky

Fenrar, too, had seen the apparition. He bared his teeth in a snarl, then let out a ragged howl. Melek fell from his jaws. Ignoring his cuts, the little scribe scrabbled over to Richard and Orkan. For an instant, Fenrar's eyes twitched in their direction then turned to the approaching horse. As he did so, the wolf's legs and muzzle began to stretch, his body filled out and hooves formed in place of paws. Fenrar was becoming a winged horse.

The white horse came in to land with the sun behind him. Fenrar shielded his eyes against the glare and lunged with his hooves, but the white horse struck him with such force that Fenrar lost his balance. Then with a torrent of heavy

blows the white horse smashed Fenrar to the ground. The trio watched with disbelief as Fenrar's inert body changed into a myriad of different shapes before disappearing completely.

The white horse cantered over to Richard.

"I am Ravan," the horse said gently. "I'm glad I reached you in time. Golan's Forces are almost ready. I have come to help you to complete your quest."

"There's still one more pod to find here," Richard said urgently, "but Fenrar took all our belongings including the pods I had."

"Everything's hidden over here," Ravan said, heading towards a sand dune.

The final obstacle

The companions rushed to retrieve their belongings. After donning his armour, Richard took out the Path Finder and soon located the last pod. It was nestling amongst a mass of razor-edged palm fronds at the top of one of the tallest trees at the oasis. The trunk of the tree was covered in sharp, down-pointing projections.

"I'll get scratched to pieces climbing this," Richard said, glancing at the trunk's vicious surface.

"Leave it to me," Ravan said.

The horse flew above the tree and, gripping the pod gently between his teeth, brought it down to Richard.

Orkan and Melek whooped with joy as Richard held the purple pod in his palm. This was it – the last pod! His quest was almost over.

"Well done!" Ravan said. "Now, all of you get on my back and I'll take you to the Ancestral City."

Last leg of the journey

Richard, Orkan and Melek clambered on to Ravan's back. Seconds later they were in the air, circling above Wizard's Well.

As they flew high above the ground, Ravan brought the trio up to date with news of the underground's progress. Golan had rallied all his forces and was waiting only for Richard's return with the pods.

There was also bad news. Armor, Guardian of the Common Beasts, had

been killed by Cozards before he was able to rejoin Broon and the rest his troops. The Evil One was summoning his most powerful forces to the Ancestral City. His army would be bigger, stronger and more terrifying than anything Golan's Forces had encountered so far.

Richard realized that his task was far from finished. On the horizon the sky was darkening with the first black clouds of night. Or was it night? Something deep inside told Richard that the darkness had more to do with the Evil One than with any natural occurrence.

For a while the three made sporadic conversation, then fell silent as they sped towards the Ancestral City, and to possible death in the Final Battle.

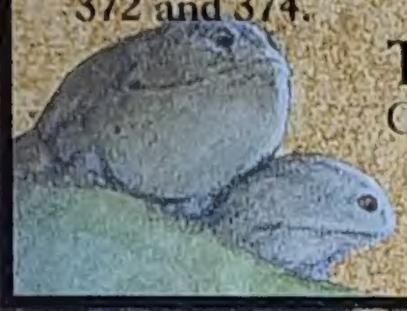
Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

Look out for these friendly creatures hiding somewhere in the illustrations in this issue.

In issue 24, Shoomi and Shoobi were on pages 372 and 374.



The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the tokens and location recorder, and add them to your game pieces.

Life Force Pod

Can you spot the last pod hidden in one of the illustrations in less than three minutes?

In issue 24, did you locate the tall bottle on the left of page 380 marked:

Monsters and Magic

Read about the Werewolf and Witches on Morbane's story cards. Which of these characters do you think Fenrar is based on?

In issue 24, Syrus, the Spirit of the Sky, was based on the Genie of the Lamp.

Check your answers in the next issue.

Battle Axe

A game for 3 players using all your Monster Might cards, including Good and Evil Pods.

Aim

To be the only player with any points left.

Scoring

Each player starts with 300 points. Battle Axe cards score penalty points against you to the value on each card, except the Evil One and two Pod cards which carry 26 penalty points.

Before you Start

Shuffle cards. Each player chooses a card and highest number deals first.

How to Play

1 Deal all the cards, so each player has 18.
2 Each player looks at their cards and selects 3 cards to pass on to the player to their left.
Pod cards cannot be passed on.
3 The player to the left of the Dealer lays a card face-up on the table.
4 The other players follow in turn with a card of the same suit. The player who lays the highest number in the suit first laid takes the set, places it to one side and lays the next card.
*You **must** follow suit if you can, otherwise you can lay another suit, Pod or Battle Axe card.*
5 Continue the round until all sets are won. Then each player looks at their cards, adds up the number of Battle Axe points and takes the number away from their 300 total.
6 Play continues with players taking turn to deal until only one player is left with any points.

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FORTNIGHTLY PARTS
The Ancestral Trail
AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS
26 The Evil One
Fight to the Finish in the Final Battle

In Issue 26

The Evil One

Richard's long and arduous search for the precious pods is over, but the battle for the Ancestral City must still be won. Will the Life Force Pods be returned to the Tree of Life and the Guardians be reinstated?

plus

- Morbane tells us about mysterious beings who die yet are not dead!
- More tokens for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game.
- The final piece to complete the Ancestral World puzzle map.

Coming in Issue 27

Tengam, Gravity Defier

His task over, Richard's thoughts are of returning home – but this is not be. A new challenge awaits our hero in the cold, terrifying confines of Cyberworld!

plus

Your first **Techscan** card • 3 **Cyber Power** cards • Binary Decoder card • The first playing pieces for **Cyber Chess**.

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